

THE RETURN OF WINIBOTTOM

Old Man Greenhut Shows Himself Better Than the Fourth Seven.

The circumstances under which Mr. Jake Winterbottom abandoned his associates and the saloon frequented by them and kept by old man Greenhut in Arkansas City had been discussed both angrily and sorrowfully a number of times by those who had left, but no adequate understanding of his act, or none that seemed adequate, had been reached, so indignation, surprise and regret were inextricably blended in a jumble in the minds of the astute poker coterie of the little river town.

"I reckon," said old man Greenhut when one of these discussions had gone on for some time, "I reckon as how if the Scriptures had been written in these days there'd 'a been one line changed anyhow. Likely there'd 'a been a heap more, but one on 'em'd 'a been word different, sure. The prophet what said 'Frailty, thy name is woman,' would most likely said, 'Frailty, thy name is Winterbottom.'"

"I don't see no signs o' frailty in what Jake did," said Joe Bassett. "Looks to me like he was too doggone cunning for to be called frail."

"Gettin' away with a hell roarin' big wad o' money, didn't he, what he did? There cou'n't 'a been no other way, did it, with p'tendin' for to croustout there cou'n't he get a call out from him fr his hull wad, an' then throwed down the winnin' hand, didn't he, him havin' a straight flush, an' tryin' to make us think Jim Blaisdell had slipped up on the deal an' o' g've him a plain flush, him havin' slipped a spade in, 'stead o' th' club him dove give him?"

"Done all that, didn't he, an' then snok abo'd the boat with his cousin, p'tendin' he was goin' for to fetch him back? I don't call that frailty. Looks to me more like he'llishness, an' we uns all pals o' him for years."

And the big sheriff spat viciously upon the stove.

"You don't quite appertain my meanin', Joe," said the old man. "I was havin' reference to his moral frailty. Look to me like Jake's moral ain't what we reckoned on. 'Pears like he was weak an' when a man's weak on moral character th' ain't enough left on him for to be with sweepin' up."

"Mebbe you're right about that," said Jim Blaisdell, bitterly, "but I'd feel more easy like if he was to be sweepin'."

"Ain't liable for to be," remarked Sam Pearsall. "Down the river 's where he went, an' that's some sizable of a place. More'n likely he's done made his getaway for good. I ain't lookin' for him to show up here again."

"There were many more things that might have been said concerning their old associate's defection, but inasmuch as they had all been said repeatedly on previous occasions no one felt himself called on to repeat them, and the four friends sat smoking silently. It would indeed be almost impossible to conceive of any happening that would have disconcerted these four worthies more than the departure of Mr. Winterbottom had done. The circumstances were exactly as Bassett described them, but they seemed almost incredible, for Winterbottom had been for years regarded as the most thoroughly loyal and reliable member of the party.

For him to desert his pals, even for the prospect of sharing in his lily cousin's prosperity, was as if some planet had appeared or as if the Mississippi River had dried up. Their dismay was natural and inevitable.

For some days after his sudden departure they had expected him to reappear with a plausible explanation at least, but this had failed away, and they were indeed sore at heart. It was therefore a complete surprise to them all when the door opened and Mr. Winterbottom walked in quietly.

"Howdy, boys," he said in a matter of fact way. "Here one on me." And he walked to the bar.

In his manner there was no trace of embarrassment, and he extended his invitation as one who had not for the slightest degree altered the course of his life.

When he saw, however, that his old friends sat motionless, regarding him with distrust and hostility, and that old man Greenhut sat staring at him with a prompt reaching for the bottles and glasses glanced involuntarily toward his bungster's own manner changed.

"I was astin' you uns to take a drink," he said in a somewhat sarcastic tone. "I reckon I didn't speak none too plain. 'Pears like you all done had paralysis, or somethin'." Aint there no rum to be had in this house?"

"I reckon there's rum enough to be had in this house," said old man Greenhut, "but we uns is some p'ticular about who we drink with."

Only one answer to this was permissible under the code that reigned in Arkansas City, and Mr. Winterbottom's hand dropped suddenly to his hip pocket. Quick as he was, the big Sheriff was quicker, and had not for the amazing agility of old man Greenhut himself there would certainly have been tragic happenings then and there.

The old man, however, was equal to the emergency. A quickness of his wrist brought the bungster down on Bassett's gun and sent it to the floor, from where a random shot buried itself in the heel of Blaisdell's foot. A second shot caught him in the right hand, and he fell to a position of advantage over Winterbottom's head.

"One o' the house rules is there aint no shootin' down on the premises," he said sternly. "If you uns is hell bent on killin' you'll have to go out on the levee. 'Pears to me, though, as how it might be better to talk things over. Mebbe Jake ain't no such o' a renegade as we uns think."

"Me a renegade?" exclaimed Winterbottom in wrathful surprise. "Who says so? And his hand went back toward his hip pocket."

"Well, there hadn't nobody said it, not yet there hadn't," said Jim Blaisdell with a provoking drawl, "but when a man comes away a straight flush that's come to him providential like an' then leaves his pals for to go off with the yep 'stead o' the pot, looks to me like it was up to him for to prove 't he ain't no such yep 'dog as he says he is."

Winterbottom's face was a picture of bewilderment for just a moment. Then he grinned.

"I see plain the funny," he said, in this old hearty manner. "I reckon the drinks is on me anyhow, but I sure do take it kind o' hard 't you uns didn't know me better. Mebbe I'd oughter let you in on the same 'fore I done played it so fur. Again be turned to this bar."

"This time the temptation was too strong and the treat was accepted, though it was not an explanation would have been made."

"I seen plain the funny," said Winterbottom after he had wiped his lips. "How if we skun Cousin Bill outen his hind wad o' the red I could play him further, an' I knowed, what I done told you uns, that there was a heap more money behind that wad, so I done throwed the money to catch the catfish."

"When I went out to see him I was reckonin' on him leavin' town so sudden, but the boat was leavin' an' just as he was leavin' I saw him. He was plumb tickled to see me. He said, 'I been livin' in the wad's shirt ever since.'"

"Him an' me 's done cleaned up nuff a dozen gams since then, 'count o' him knowin' I throwed the winnin' hand. 'S back here now with more money in 't Arkansas City 's done seen in a year. More'n that, he's lookin' for another game with you uns."

"I reckon the drinks is on the house this time," said old man Greenhut. "An' more'n that, you uns had ought to be to repent o' your sins in o'looth an' 'ashes for chokin' o'um onto a old pal like Jake 'bout knowin' what you all is talkin' about."

"Well, I ain't sayin' but what mebbe Jake meant well," said Jim Blaisdell, grudgingly. "Bein' as he done fetched his cousin back fr another game it looks like it might be all right, but 'tain't no gre't encouragement for a man to play skilful when his pal chucks a straight flush 't'er he's took the trouble to give it to him."

"Did look bad," said Winterbottom. "but I done told you uns 'fore that I was hell bent on gettin' the Winterbottom wad outen Cousin Bill. 'bouter takin' no 'count o' the wad o' pocket money he was totin'."

"But I reckon that 'll be about all. If you uns ain't lookin' for to see in for a game o' cards, then you uns had ought to yawn, an' I 'e'n find some other way easy enough."

"Now don't get riled, Jake," interposed old man Greenhut, hastily. "You uns got just natchally some disturbed for to see a artistic deal spilled, but nobody hain't had no reel doubts about you, Jake. We knowed you was doin' the best you knowed, even if we didn't quite see through it."

"When did you say you'd fetch your cousin round, an' how much d'you say he had with him?"

"I didn't say," observed Winterbottom, "but I reckon Bill's liable for to come in to-morrow 'f he's sober enough. He ain't just now."

It was plain that the veteran still felt hurt at the suspicions of his friends, and seeing this, they changed the subject of the discussion and by restricting their attention to potables they succeeded at last in restoring his old time geniality.

On the morrow Bill Winterbottom proved to be sufficiently sober to appear, but finally said that he had been almost chafing the entire party, excepting Greenhut, sat in at a game of draw, unlimited.

It was evident that the outsider relied on the aid of help from Jake that he had had before, and the others, seeing this, had high hopes. It was not known how much of the Winterbottom estate was in all on the other hand, old man Greenhut's reserve had never yet been exhausted, and in a case like this they all knew that he would back the game indefinitely.

For a game with such startling possibilities this one opened tamely enough. The ante was \$5 call \$10, but no extra-gam bets were made in the first few rounds, and not more than \$500 or \$600 had trailed once more. Bassett picked up a jackpot for the size of it, or \$50, on Bassett's deal.

Bill Winterbottom, having first said that he was a little startled, then he and Pearsall opened in the next deal. Jake Winterbottom came in, Blaisdell dropped and Bassett made it \$100 to draw cards.

Bill Winterbottom with a joyous whoop raised it another hundred and Pearsall dropped, having only two kings. Jake Winterbottom trailed and Bassett dropped, leaving him with a pair of aces.

"Looks like you was thinkin' you had somethin'," said Bill Winterbottom, jeeringly, "but I reckon you'd better look again. 'It cost you \$500 more to play that!"

Jake glanced at his cousin hastily, and being apparently satisfied with what he saw came in again, whereupon Bassett, having a pair of aces, remarked that he reckoned that 'd be about enough before the draw and made good without raising.

"I play these," said Bill, confidently, when Bassett took up the deck to serve the draw, and Jake after a little deliberation took one card.

Then Bassett studied for a long time, but finally said that he had another look at the cards and that he had decided that he'd be about enough before the draw and made good without raising.

"I play these," said Bill, confidently, when Bassett took up the deck to serve the draw, and Jake after a little deliberation took one card.

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MR. GNAGG IN YULETIDE FORM

HE TALKS ABOUT GIFTS FOR HIS WIFE'S RELATIONS.

Makes a Guess at What His Wife Wants for Herself and Has Anticipations of His Own Present—At the End He Goes to Business as a Happy Man.

Mrs. Gnagg having ventured to suggest that she would be needing a little money wherewith to do the Christmas gift buying, Mr. Gnagg entered into the spirit of Yuletide cheer about as follows:

Oh, the regular old Christmas goose, eh? Well, I've been expecting that touch, I'm bound to admit that.

That's one of the holdups that can't seem to be flagged, that Christmas sand-bagging. Doesn't make a particle of difference whether a man believes 'way down deep in him that the whole Christmas gag is tommyrot and folsdero—and that's the way most sensible men do regard it, or if he's to inform you—why, he's got to yield to the annual imposition and submit to the Christmas stickup and let his views and principles go.

It isn't that I mind handing out gifts and tokens and remembrances and such like to people that I like and all that sort of thing. Nothing whatever like that. Enjoy giving things away in fact.

But it's the idea of being held up, pinned to the stick, corralled and shrouded and all in conformity with a fool convention incidental to a season that I don't take any stock in. That's what makes me hot around the collar every time.

Well, how much is the whole stickup going to set me back this year, eh? I don't know, but I reckon it's going to be a good deal, eh? I don't know, but I reckon it's going to be a good deal, eh? I don't know, but I reckon it's going to be a good deal, eh?

How's that? You can't say exactly? Why can't you say exactly? Is it going to cost me a hundred, a thousand, a million, a billion? You can give me some kind of an estimate, can't you? Why can't you tell me out of hand just about how much of a pull-down you're expecting to blow in this year for Christmas junk? You can add up simple figures, can't you?

Oh, it seems sordid, does it, to write out a list with the price set opposite each article? Oh, sordid, hey? That's the view you take of it, is it? But it doesn't seem sordid to you to pin a nut to the wall and get through him for about every dollar he gets in his clothes, does it?

Huh! Sordid, you say! Pretty toplofty! You're getting all of a sudden, it seems to me. The coin has to be got, you know, and I have to go out and get it, and it doesn't look very sordid to me, I can tell you, after I've got it. It looks pretty good to me, on the contrary.

Apparently, though, it looks like chalk or tin tags or cigarette coupons to you, the way you go out and blow it on people that you don't care a fig for. Sordid, hey? Well, that's new!

However, we won't haggle about that end of it. We might just as well get this business over with as soon as possible, and that's what we'll do if you'll permit me to nudge in a word occasionally.

In the first place let me put myself on record. Please be good enough to refrain from getting me any gift of any kind whatsoever this year. Just keep my name off the list. There's nothing that I want or could use.

I've got everything I need in the way of trinkets or junk, and what's the use of littering up the place with truck that can't be of any earthly good to me, usefully or ornamentally? Huh? Oh, you've got my present all picked out, and set aside, have you?

Of course you have. I might have known that. Surest thing in the world that you'd have it picked out. Oh, well, I might as well surrender that point right away, then. I've got to stand for having you get me something that I won't be able to use and that no human being on earth could use. Please be good enough to refrain from getting me any gift of any kind whatsoever this year. Just keep my name off the list. There's nothing that I want or could use.

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for him, as usual, eh? It's a wonder you don't get him a five hundred dollar split second Jurgensman watch. I'm the biggest man in the Standard Oil Company, you know, and the price of a watch of that kind isn't gum money to me.

Now your Aunt Zenobia or Aunt Noble, as you call her. Why don't you send her a mushroom hat with a forty-two dollar algortie on it or one of those split down the side straight as a lath dresses?

How's that? You've already got her present picked out and it's a cut glass bowl marked down for sixteen bucks to two eighty-nine? What's going to happen? Well, that's one of the crew that isn't going to sting me so hard as usual this year, anyhow—Aunt Noble.

Thanks, Noble. Everything is forgiven. You've been breaking it off in me new for a good many Christmases, but there's nothing hard or callous about me and when you let me off with two eighty-nine I'm not the man to remember previous wrongs.

Now your Auntie Clytemnestra—how much have you got in mind for Clyt's Christmas blowoff this year?

By the way, I saw a nice little set of silver in a box in one of the stores to-day that was priced at a mere twenty hundred and fifty bucks and why wouldn't that be a nice modest little gift for Aunt Clytemnestra? You see, she always just breaks her neck to send you something fine and dandy—a box of green apples or three or four pounds of farm ground buckwheat or something like that—and you ought, really, to sort o' loosen up for her.

Maybe she'd appreciate a set of blue fox fur or something like that? Or perhaps she—

Huh? What! WHAT! You're only going to send Clyt a nice Christmas card with a printed Yuletide message on it this year? Wait a minute. Wait'll I go out and bathe my wrists in cold water. I think I'm going to swoon or else burst into tears out of sheer gratitude.

A Christmas card only for your Auntie Clytemnestra? Here, I'll tell you with that one there just as hard as you can. I'm glad to hear that and I want to come out of it. Wheel! Aunt Clyt isn't going to prong me for about twenty-two and a half this year! Whee again! Hoory! Four cheers!

Oh, but wait a minute. Now we come to Cousin Julie. I mustn't get too gay or glad some until after we've disposed of Cousin Julie. Now don't tell me all over again how once when you were a wee bit of a girl and were visiting her on a Saturday she made a whole sponge cake for you and gave you a whole piece of it for yourself. I know all about that benevolent deed of Cousin Julie's, you know.

You've told me about it at this season every year since we were married, you know. I'd hate to try to dope out with pad and pencil just how much that piece of immortal sponge cake has set me back, taking all of the Christmases of our married life into account, but it must amount to about enough to buy a diamond necklace for somebody by this time.

Well, how about Cousin Spengoak—Cousin Julie, I mean? I s'pose you're going to send her a silver trimmed Russian droosky with a couple of specially imported Russian horses to pull it or something like that, eh? Maybe you've got it in mind to stake her to—

—going to send—her—a Christmas—card—too?

Barney, a moment. I am going to telephone and ask central if this is North America I am living in and ask her what time it is and get a few facts like that together in order to test myself out a little. My private opinion is that I'm on my way to the booby hatch, but I want to have it confirmed.

A Christmas card—only—for—Cousin Julie? Well, that settles it. I'm all in. I knew this overwork would tell on me. And after that piece of spongecake that she gave you on that Saturday 'way back yonder in the mist of the cluttered years, too? But stay! Wait a minute! Maybe that Christmas card for Cousin Julie is going to cost about nineteen bucks and twenty-five cents!

Huh? No? Only twenty cents? Let's have those smelling salts of yours, if you please. Or else if I'm asleep don't wake me up. I love these trances while they last, anyhow.

Now we'll get down to— Here, I've got to go to the office. You finish out the rest of the list yourself. I don't care how hard you wallop me now, on the level I go.

Go as far as you like. Whatever else may ail me, why, I'm not lacking in gratitude, and when Aunt Noble and Aunt Clytemnestra and Cousin Julie soak me for only two eighty-nine and a couple of Christmas cards between 'em, why, it's me for a Merry Christmas and a hull lot of 'em, and the family bankroll is yours to do as you like with!

NO FUN INSPECTING BOILERS.

One Reason Is The Engineers. Another The Boilers Themselves.

The agent for a company that insures boilers was one of a party of men who were discussing the unpleasant work that some men have to do, and he insisted that if anybody has a disagreeable job it is his to do.

It is the first place of it, said the speaker. "The inspector doesn't know when he tackles a boiler whether the engineer is telling him the truth about its condition. His experience has led him to believe that the engineer will find it convenient to overlook some defect that in the end will probably prove serious."

"Then the inspector goes to work himself with the intention of finding the weaknesses that may have been noticed or may have escaped the attention of the engineer. The inspector has a hot, disagreeable job, and he is not to be faulted for it."

The inspector is regarded in some quarters the same as is the quarantine officer when scarlet fever breaks out and he comes to look up the red card. His coming is viewed with suspicion, and he is considered a chronic fault finder. For that reason the engineer takes great joy in hiding a defect, no matter how small, and if the inspector goes away without seeing it the engineer will regard it as a huge joke and tell it to all the friends he can trust.

This attitude of the engineer is frequently due to the belief that because he has been tending this one boiler all his life he knows more about it than an inspector who looks at thousands. The engineer is grievously mistaken, for the very fact that the inspector looks at so many boilers makes it certain that he will not miss a defect.

Sometimes the inspector gets a real surprise, for occasionally he meets an engineer who wants to cooperate in safeguarding the boiler, and this engineer will have both the interior and the exterior of the boiler as clean as possible so as to facilitate the inspection and make it less difficult to notice defects.

The life he leads does not make the boiler inspector a merry, carefree person with the exception of the fact that he is ready enough to respond to friendly advances. When one considers the different kinds of men the inspectors meet and the different kinds of boilers they have to look at, it can be seen that the inspector cannot be expected to go around radiating good nature and just bursting to tell the engineer a new joke.

MAIZIE GIVES A SUPPER PARTY

After Which Little Goldie Goes Out of the Window and a Reconciliation Is Off.

Maizie was so absorbed in "Little Goldie, the Beautiful Mill Girl," that the postman was compelled to sound his whistle three separate and distinct times. The letter was for George and bore a London postmark.

She surveyed the missive from all sides, sniffed at it and after fingering the large seal securing the envelope decided that it could not be opened without detection.

"Smells like hop," was her comment. "I s'pose it's from one of those burlesque fieshees he used to go around with. Goodness knows if I had my job with 'The Alderman' and all the jolly I've hooked to keep this flat going anybody could take him and welcome. If I ever marry again it'll be a property man or a carpenter. They work steady and hand it over every payday, and when they do want a drink a can of suds satisfies 'em. Millionaires' sons are all punk."

From these reflections it may be surmised that Maizie was disaffected with things. And the poor girl really had a grievance.

When she resigned her leadership of the Amazons with an opera company to marry into a family of wealth she naturally expected a life of automobiles, dianas, pink teas and monkey dinners. But unfortunately George's father was a Book of Gibraltar; in other words, he refused to come across with the kale.

Now George, while a most amiable young man, was not a hewer of wood, and moreover he had an abnormal thirst for malt, spirituous and vinous liquors. Consequently Maizie was compelled to pledge various articles of personal adornment in order to maintain the household. True, George was willing enough and had secured a job at selling ice on commission, but the only frozen liquid he disposed of was contained in highballs.

Maizie was deep in "Little Goldie" when George came in and picked up his letter. "By jove, it's from Lord Scapple!" he cried.

"Well, don't put on any dog on that account," said Maizie. "We used to have a lord hanging around the Casino, and he got sent over to the Island for lifting wardrobe out of the dressing rooms."

"This is my brother-in-law," explained George. "He and my sister, Isabel are coming over to spend the holidays with the folks in Pittsburgh."